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On: 04 March 2015, At: 00:08

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK

Religious Education: The official journal of the Religious Education Association

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/urea20>

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Published online: 10 Jul 2006.

To cite this article: Shailer Mathews D.D. (1911) THE CALL TO AMERICAN PARENTS, Religious Education: The official journal of the Religious Education Association, 6:1, 49-54, DOI: [10.1080/0034408110060105](https://doi.org/10.1080/0034408110060105)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0034408110060105>

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THE CALL TO AMERICAN PARENTS.

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New America is not a merely rhetorical expression. The America we know is not the America we knew in our youth, and the America our children will know will be something different from ours. We live in a changing nation because we live in a changing order. America is what America is *becoming*.

For this, if for no other reason, the relation of the family to the nation is both dynamic and passive. It, too, is changing as it is affected by the forces that are making tomorrow. But it is itself also the source of change. A disintegrating home means a disintegrating society. A new generation will carry out into the world ideals or vulgarity which it has learned at home. The most superficial observer will not deny that the family as exemplified in American homes is passing through a transformation, which, although not beyond control, is full of portent for American society.

It is this double fact of a transformation of the family which is both in process and yet not beyond control and of a direct influence of the family upon social transformation, that constitutes the call to American parents. The call, in brief, is one to an increased realization of the responsibilities of parenthood in a social order that has changed the conditions in which parental responsibilities were once exercised and yet needs parental influence as an aid in the maintenance of social ideals.

I.

As to what these changed conditions may be that set new problems to American fathers and mothers, it is not necessary to discuss in detail. It must suffice to describe briefly some of the most important.

1. *There is, first, the prolongation of parental youth.* It is not merely because we parents are not as old as our parents lived to be that we regard ourselves as relatively younger than they. The break in interests between growing children and their parents is not as marked as formerly. As we all know, the parent himself has many interests in common with his children, especially as they enter college age. The enormous development of sport leads fathers to share in something which their sons regard as of prime im-

portance, even though their participation in sports be that of observers only. Golf has added a generation to the play-period of American men, while the universal interest in baseball and athletics of various sorts serves to perpetuate a comradeship between fathers and sons the older days forbade. Mothers no longer find their interests limited to home and church. Their clubs and social duties keep them alert and their attitude of mind youthful.

The immediate effect of this change from authority to comradeship between parents and children has never, to my knowledge, been particularly studied, but it raises the question how far the new spirit of comradeship can preserve the legitimate elements of the older parental authority. If your son can out-box you, out-run you, and out-golf you, what becomes of that fear of the father that was once the beginning of filial obedience?

2. *A second change is the substitution of social for parental oversight of children.* In this respect our modern civilization has moved towards the ideals of Plato's *Republic*. We look to society for our children's education in book learning and for such education in morals and religion as they may chance to receive. We rely upon clubs and Boy Scouts for vitalizing righteousness with athletics, and upon municipalities for playgrounds, playhouses and instruction in playing. So far have we moved from the older conception that parents have responsibilities in this particular that it takes no special powers of prophecy to foresee a future in which the home shall be the place where children are born, sleep, eat two meals a day, and are cared for during the period of infancy. And the state is already providing nursery and kindergartens where mothers may be relieved of the care of their infants during part of the day.

While we must regard this increase of the parental activities of the community as a welcome good in the case of the poor, it is none the less a symptom of a radical change in the conception of parental responsibilities and an appreciable influence in lessening the sense of parental obligation.

3. *A third element of change is the industrialization of womanhood.* The economic implications of such a change are receiving an ever increasing attention, although unfortunately even in this regard society still works in the spirit of the opportunist. From the point of view of the family, however, the results are far less understood. True, we begin to see that the replacement of parental authority by community care is closely allied with the development

of the industrialization of woman's life. But we have yet to develop ethical concepts and even social conventions for the family in which both father and mother are wage-earners. It is no solution of the problem to insist that the increased family income will permit the employment of unmarried women to care for the children. That, in the nature of the case, is only another phase of the general transformation of the sense of parental responsibilities.

4. *The increasing prevalence of divorce complicates the situation among families which are not Roman Catholic.* Parental responsibility cannot be assumed by both members of divorced couples. There has yet to be invented a code which shall teach the children which of their various remarried fathers and mothers they are to honor. The increasing number of de-parented children is a constant evidence that the obligation of parenthood is secondary to the individual interests of fathers and mothers.

II.

These four elements of our new situation are by no means the only forces affecting the American family and through it American society, but they are sufficiently strong to cause apprehension lest the family should not be a helpful factor in the transformation of society. He would indeed be a wise man who could give advice fitted to forestall all the dangers involved, but one thing seems axiomatic: A society will not rise higher than its families. Barring the matter of divorce I neither see nor want to see a change in the general situation. Fathers and mothers should continue to enjoy the richer life granted them by our modern world. To protect and support our offspring is not the only function of those of us who are parents. We have our own individual lives, which as lives go, are just as sacred as those of our children. But we need to adjust the profession of parenthood to our other professions and avocations.

The call to American parents is really four-fold. First, is the call to *the establishment of a parental authority that shall pre-suppose comradeship and be defensible as just.* Fathers and mothers should be the friends of their children but they should be something more. In our illumined world there is danger lest the command that children honor their parents should be revised into the command, "Parents humor your infants and send out questionnaires about adolescents." The word authority, I admit, just now is not very popular, pedagogically speaking, but I am convinced that there will be no more regard for authority in the nation than there is

regard for authority in the nation's homes. The American parent has proved unfaithful to the state, to say nothing about his children, when he has given his sons and daughters a monthly allowance and has then let them do what they please. Even in our modern disillusioned families there is plenty of need for children to learn that experience counts for something; that fathers and mothers know more than their children as to the proper time to go to bed, proper persons to play with, proper things to eat, proper books to read, and proper plays to see. The authority of experience can always be shown by parents to be based on justice. It takes more patience to exercise this order of authority and to explain the reason for its exercise than it does to punish children or to be good natured and let them do whatever they like. But the call to such patience and to accompanying firmness in dealing with children whether small or large is not to be ignored. Children who wheedle their parents into letting them act foolishly, are being educated to bribe legislatures into letting them act lawlessly.

There is therefore, need for the moral education of parents, as well as of children. Just as charity testifies to the failure of our present industrial order, the need of turning boys and girls over to clubs to keep them out of mischief is a tribute to the decline of American parenthood. How many good natured American papas would serve as substitutes for the Hebrew father as the moral symbol of God?

A second call to American parents is to *the maintenance of a rational standard of living*. Thrift is all but extinct in the average American family. We not only live up to our income, but we live beyond it. Too many of us neither practice nor inculcate self-denial. We let our boys and girls grow up with no clear conception of the value of money, and send them out into the world slaves to wants which as parents we have no right to develop even for ourselves. The rising generation of Americans is being trained to enter life with the same standard of living, the same social ambitions, and the same scale of expense as their parents have attained only in their maturity. If we have nothing else to bequeath our children we ought to leave them a rational standard of living. The boy who sees his father borrow money to buy a motor car is being taught that a penny saved is a penny lost. Thrift may be a *bourgeois* virtue, but we have not yet established a utopia in which it will be unnecessary for our children to pay their bills.

A third call to American parents is to *educate children in a contagious moral idealism*. We hear a vast amount of advice to the effect that children are to be taught the mysteries of sex. There are few subjects more in the fore-ground of some educational philosophies. It almost seems as if the sum and substance of the training which parents should give their children is physiological. There is, of course, an element of need here, and this I would not minimize, but I profoundly believe that the maintenance of moral ideals in families will do vastly more for the maintenance of chastity than a perpetual discussion of eugenics. After all, the great principles that build up individuals and nations are not physiological or neurological, important as these may be. A healthy virtue never rested finally on a healthy body. We still are souls, even though we may have lost the definition of what souls are. It is a mistake to teach boys and girls to substitute physiology for the decalogue. Lives grounded in moral idealism withstand temptations far better than lives which have been taught only a prudential chasity. Though parents have the tongues of physicians and though children know all sex-mysteries and have not cleanness of mind, it profiteth nothing. And cleanness of mind is caught rather than taught. So too is the spirit of family love. If parents want their children happily married they must make their own marriage happy. A home in which the father and mother maintain the courtesies born of christian ideals, is a far safer place for growing boys and girls than a family in which such relations are cheapened by commonplace quarreling. American parents need to wear their company manners at home. A disintegrating love between parents will re-appear in selfish and vulgarity if nothing worse in the children. This may seem old-fashioned to those who believe that children can be enlightened into moral enthusiasms. For my part I believe that such enthusiasms are contagious—a form of life, rather than of intellectualism. Fathers and mothers are not merely men and women who have had children; they are parents with a home to maintain and ideals to bequeath.

A fourth call to American parents is to *the establishment of family religion*. Such an appeal can come only to those who are committed to the religious view of life, but a society in which there is no leaven of religious families, will never be made thoroughly religious by Sunday schools and revival meetings. A meeting-house religion is not the moral equal of a dwelling-house religion. Take men and women as you find them, and you will too often

discover that the religion of the average American family is either a survival of its grandfather's or is less in evidence. Unless all signs fail, during the past few years there has been a rapidly progressing obliteration of family religion, both in the form of family prayer and that of saying grace at meat. We do not even expect our children to sit with us in the family pew. The rush of our daily life, the erection of new and imperative interests, even the rise of Sunday schools have conspired to this end. This is not to say that fathers and mothers are not religious, but rather to say that they are religious away from home. They can talk about religion to other people's children more readily than to their own. Yet a religion that does not find its expression in the family group is not likely to propagate itself beyond the second and third generation.

This four-fold call to American parents constitutes a demand that the family, as the family, be given its proper status in American society. But such re-instatement cannot be made by law. It must be a matter of the conscience of individual fathers and mothers. The center of their interests must pass from their wants and enjoyments as men and women to their obligations as fathers and mothers, to the needs of the child, or better to the needs of the family as a unit. Divorce is a domesticated pathological individualism. It can mostly be prevented by sanctified common sense, the practice of commonplace self-sacrifices and a revived devotion to the up-bringing of children. If parents should make such a shift of emphasis from the individual to the family needs, many of the difficulties implicit in the changes through which American society is now passing, will be offset. There is no cure for the evils of progress except the moralizing of the forces of progress. The family is one of the agencies by which every individual parent may make his contribution—be it ever so humble—to this moral re-birth. The church must grapple with one of its old time duties: it must evangelize parental as well as civic relations; it must train men and women to educate the children in their own homes, as well as to rescue other people's children from evil homes. In a word, it must make the family that which Jesus made it, the symbol of the Kingdom of God.